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# FANTASTIC

*Novels*



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# LOST— ONE MYLODON

By

Elmer Brown Mason

THE fact of the matter is that, for a man who makes a profession of exploring expeditions, Pete Wells (which is me) had been in civilization too long. I was ripe to go any place where there were no waiters to be tipped. Certainly Bones' physical charms didn't lure me from my happy table in Old Swartz's Café, Jacksonville, Florida, U. S. A. The top of his head looked like an ostrich's egg, his face was a jungle of straw-colored beard, stiff as the spines of a hedgehog, out of which peeped two innocent blue eyes, and the rest of him was completely globular. In height he was six feet, all but nine inches, and his name was Nicholas Vladimir Versch-and-all-the-rest-of-the-alphabet-well scrambled.

But, law me, how that miracle of rotundity could talk! That evening, from the time I laid down his letter of introduction until next morning, I simply listened spell-bound.

His specialty was bones, the bones of extinct animals, and he wanted me to go with him to a place called Ultima Speranza in southern Patagonia, where there was a famous cave full of bones, and then up along the Chilean Andes prospecting after the remains of beasts that had been dead so long that no one really knew how they had looked.

The proposition in itself did not appeal to me—I had tried it once before in a salt marsh on the Brazilian coast, and the 'skeeters had nearly eaten me alive—not until after the second drink, anyway, when he really began to talk. Then I started in seeing things. From a bunch of drawings of prehistoric and modern bones, he sorted the same kinds together and explained how he correlated them. First, he compared the thigh of a common or garden guinea pig to a busted up, second-

*Who ever found one? Pete Wells and the Russian did, and they'd like to have it back. It's a two-ton leftover of one of Mother Nature's earliest mistakes, loose somewhere in the Patagonian wilderness — but here's the story. . . .*

hand-looking relic of what he called a toxodon, and, before I realized it, so vividly reconstructed a nine-foot rodent, with tremendous, chisel-like teeth, that I reached under my armpit to see if my automatic was loose in its scabbard.

Then came pterodactyls, flying reptiles with long, beak-like jaws and an eighteen-foot spread of leathery wings; a cute little atlantosaurus with a thigh bone larger than an elephant's; eighty-foot-long diplocutes. . . . Honest, I was glad when the morning light filtered in, and only half of my quart of Scotch was gone, too, though the Russian had gotten away with two full bottles of white, blockade liquor—so like his native vodka, he apologized.

Of course I agreed to go with him, just couldn't help myself, and in less than a week we were on board a steamer for Valdivia, Chile.

It was a long trip, and I had plenty of time to size up my companion, and that fat little Russian seemed so simple that I just couldn't believe in him. Apparently his one object in life was the collecting of bones, and his present direct purpose to controvert some German scientist against



"I whistled so the beast would  
turn its idiotic face toward us."

whom he nursed a royal grouch because of the assertion that mylodons had sat on their haunches while pulling down the tops of trees to feed on instead of standing up like human beings.

I don't mean by all this that Bones was a freak and didn't know anything else. Quite the contrary. I don't think there was anything he didn't know something about, only nothing but prehistoric animals really interested him. He sang in the ship's concerts like a tuneful mockingbird, if you can imagine a bewhiskered mockingbird in a dinner coat that would have fitted a hogshead, never laid down two pair to a one-card draw, and took the masculine normal, or perhaps twice the normal, amount of alcohol.

He hadn't any use for the señoritas, though. A flock of them fluttered around him, but he let 'em flutter. I suppose they were attracted to him because he was so darned ugly. Women are often taken that way—no better proof than that I have had two romances in my own life, both ending happily.

**V**ALDIVIA is some little city. We put up at a hotel that even a commercial traveler couldn't have criticised. Bones slid out to look for the consul and a lot of people to whom he had letters, while I spread myself all over the waterfront trying to pick up a craft for the rest of our journey down the coast.

Gosh, but that was a punk lot of shipping! There was enough paint spread over rotten wood and rust-honeycombed iron to decorate several battleships, but not one thing I'd care to trust myself in off a lee shore. Had to give it up finally, it was getting so dark. Besides, a kind of a crowd had collected after I handed one to a skipper who demanded a hundred pesos from me for jabbing a knife into his schooner below the water-line—claimed I'd ruined it, which was probably true.

Back at the hotel, I found Bones down in the lobby, surrounded by a group of what it took no finesse to identify as reporters. They were asking him the usual fool questions: how he liked the country, how it compared with Russia, and so on, and they were calling him Count. He introduced me to the bunch, but, being only a plain American, I didn't make any big hit with them, so I bought a drink just to show how much I cared, and went up in the elevator.

"Can't stay in this town long, Pete," the Russian announced as he came into our

apartments, "or we'll be done to death socially. I was simply forced to accept a dinner invitation for us."

"All right, Count," I agreed amiably; "I'll go downstairs and rob a waiter of his glad rags. Never be it said I deserted the aristocracy in their need."

It went at that. Somehow, he never was much stuck on my horsing; didn't seem to get it.

Annexing clothes proved no trouble, and when I came back the little man had hung medals all over himself.

"Gosh!" I cried in admiration. "You certainly look the part! Sure you are only a count, not one of those grand dukes?"

He answered rather shortly that his family had always been respectable, which kind of had me guessing exactly how he meant it, and then we were whisked away in a large touring car to a club.

It was a men's dinner. If I had known that in advance, I should have worn my own clothes—and felt like a fool in them, too, since everyone else wore evening dress, mostly with some decoration. The food was fine, the drink better, and Bones was sure the whole cheese. One old chap, with more medals than a baking-powder advertisement, made a long speech about how honored they were at having the great scientist, Count Vladmir, in their midst, and the count got up and said in a few well-chosen words he was darned glad to be there. Then we ate some more and drank a lot more, while the orchestra played "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night," which seemed to have just struck that burg and struck it hard.

To be perfectly truthful, I didn't have a roaring good time. The man on my left did nothing but eat. The man on my right would only converse in English, and all he knew was "You tak' li'l drink wis me?" which I did, until he couldn't talk at all. The feast finally ended, however, and we motored back to the hotel, only hitting one lamp-post on the way.

The next morning I was off to the wharves again, and with no better result. Finally, though I hadn't the slightest hope of securing it, just on a chance, I had myself rowed out to a dandy little steam yacht in the offing. Who should come to the rail but my right-hand neighbor of the night before with his "You tak' li'l drink?" I did, and then, since he consented to talk Spanish, I explained my predicament to him.

Easiest thing in the world! His yacht was quite at our service. It really would

be a favor to him to use it, since he was forced to visit his *hacienda* in the interior for several months. He was tickled to death to be able to serve Count Vladimir. The crew was on board, the yacht provisioned.

He really meant it, too, and, congratulating myself on a piece of pure luck, we had another "li'l drink," and I beat it back to the hotel.

It was a long steam down the roughest coast I have ever seen until we swung it back of Desolation Island, and we simply never should have arrived at Ultima Speranza fiord had it not been for the luck of finding that perfectly appointed yacht with its pilots who knew the channels. As it was, within those land-locked waters we had to nose cautiously further and further inland, to the anxiety of a nervous captain and with a crew harassed by endless soundings and perpetual lookouts until, somewhat below 50°, Bones was contented to go ashore. The yacht was dismissed with orders to return in two months, and, hiring two sturdy white men from the little settlement to pack our supplies, we began forthwith our hunt for the cave.

It was an extraordinary country and, from my point of view, not a pleasant one. For a long way back from the sea, the land was arctic, bare and very rough; then came forests of enormous trees, above which rose the mountains, with silvery glaciers twisting from their sides like ribbons of burnished steel. We froze at night and boiled during the day, while the humidity was so great that mists were always rising from hidden valleys or streams, like the smoke of volcanoes.

Somehow, it all depressed me—gave me a feeling as though there was no going forward, no looking back—as though there was an inertia in all things.

I lost that feeling after we found the cave, though.

It isn't quite correct for me to say we found the cave. What we really did was to stumble on a little farm where dwelt an old, old white man, who directed us where to look. He claimed that within his time an immense piece of skin covered with greenish hair unlike that of any known animal, had been brought from there and, together with several barrels of bones, sold to men who came in ships. Then there had been some trouble with a wandering tribe of the big Patagonian Indians, and the cave had been gradually forgotten.

IT WAS a terrifically hot and muggy day when we reached the place. From the outside, it did not look like much; merely a symmetrical black half moon set in the green of the hillside. Inside, however, it opened up into a hundred-foot chamber, with walls fully thirty feet high, and the dry, sandy floor showed signs of having been disturbed in the center. It appealed to me principally as a place to get out of the sun, but the count went straight up in the air as soon as he was within.

Exactly as it had been described by Dr. Nordenskjöld! Humid atmosphere, but not too humid to reduce everything to peat. Cave dry—might find anything there!

He grabbed one of the two pointed shovels which, with a couple of mattocks, were our only collecting impedimenta, and dashed it into the undisturbed sand close to the wall. And promptly he did find something, the skeleton of a man about seven feet tall.

I didn't like it. It's all very well to dig up prehistoric animals, but I don't approve of meddling with graveyards, and a graveyard it proved to be. All along the edge of the cave, hardly two feet beneath the sand, were the skeletons of men and women, not one measuring less than six feet.

"Look here, Bones," I said. "Cover up those giants and let's get out of here. I absolutely refuse to dig up dead men, even in the interest of science."

"I don't understand," he answered, more to himself than to me. "Skeletons of comparatively modern savages, Patagonians according to the cranium. They have no business here. We'll try the middle of the cave, Pete."

I shoveled back the sand along the edges while he dug in the center, cussing quite fluently the while. It became evident that all the middle of the cave had been worked over, and his labors were rewarded only by the rib of a guanaco and a pointed sliver he claimed had been fashioned into an eating utensil from a dog's leg bone. Disgusted, we sat down, and realized for the first time that both our white bearers had disappeared, leaving their packs behind them.

After hallooing outside for a time, we saw night was falling and went back into the cave to escape the heavy dew. There was no wood for a fire, and as we sat in the darkness munching hard tack, I for one heartily wished myself back at Old Swartz's.

"It's been cleaned out," finally sighed

my companion. "Our only hope is that, farther in, it may be untouched. Are you afraid to explore the entire cave to-night, Pete?"

Darned if I wouldn't have refused if he had put it in any other way. The skeletons were on my nerves, but I didn't propose to be bluffed by any foreigner, not if he had so many medals he had to wear them on the tails of his coat.

"After you, my dear Count," I answered, fishing our electric torches out of the packs, together with a half-dozen balls of twine.

Beyond the faint moonlight from the mouth of the cave it was black dark—not the darkness of out of doors when there are neither moon nor stars, but the enclosed blackness of the inside of a camera before the cap is taken off. I tied one end of a ball of twine tightly to a shovel driven in the sand, and followed the rotund form of my companion.

Around the walls we went, and then, bending our heads, dived under a shallow arch, walking on living rock. One ball, two balls, three balls of twine unwound as we explored a narrow passage which opened up finally into a small chamber with sandy floor.

"Here's something!" exclaimed the Russian, dragging a bone from the soil. "Another guanaco," he finished disgustedly, and went on. To the left the darkness became opaque, and there was the sound of slowly dripping water. A broad passage opened before us, and suddenly above our heads, through an aperture high, high in the rock, appeared a luminous body, the moon. We swept the place with our torches and nearly at our feet a tiny spring seeped up through the sand, flowing down an incline of white, luminous slime into the darkness. Bones took one step forward, lost his footing, fell, and, dropping his torch at my feet, rolled swiftly out of sight down the sloping way, his round body picking up the clay like a snowball adds to its bulk as it hurtles down a hillside.

To save my soul I couldn't help it—I roared. There was a crash in the distance like the breaking of dry branches before a fleeing deer, and then the count's voice:

"Laugh, you damned hyena," came cheerily up to me; "I've fallen into a bone-yard. Wrap my torch in your shirt and throw it down to me."

"Hadn't I better come down?"

"Don't! don't!" he yelled. "It's slippery

as ice! You'll have to get a rope to haul me out!"

I raised my own light high above my head and, putting his torch into a bundle with my shirt, threw to where I could dimly discern his figure, a glittering white globe below me. The bundle fell short. In vain he tried to climb up the slippery incline to it, while I howled with laughter; then, abandoning his attempts, he began to dig steps in the slime with a large, pointed bone. In half an hour he had progressed to where my shirt lay, and then, as the easiest mode of locomotion, rolled back to the bottom again.

The snapping on of his light showed the walls clearly. It was nothing more than a shoot down which he had fallen, a shoot paved with luminous, white phosphorescent clay all the way to the bottom, where it ended in a chamber twenty feet in circumference and literally filled with bones. They were banked up the sides, protruding from the ground. The little fat man was standing on them.

As he pulled the gruesome relics about the Russian growled out short sentences, "Damned guanacos again! Rabbit! A jaguar femur—what should that be doing here? Pete! Pete! I've found it, and part of the skin on it! A *mylodon*! A *mylodon* without question!"

"Hurrah for the *mylodon*!" I shouted enthusiastically. "I'll go back now and get a rope, and meanwhile, you work as far up the slide as you can. Tomorrow, we'll arrange some kind of a light in here and dig the whole thing up."

"All right!" he yelled. "Hurry back, though! It isn't pleasant, being left alone in the bowels of the earth!"

I TIED the cord to a projecting piece of rock and turned back, letting the twine run through my fingers as I walked. Not twenty feet around the next corner, my torch suddenly went out, the battery exhausted. Great God, but it was dark! The sweat poured from my bare shoulders in spite of the fact that it would only mean leaving Bones alone in the darkness if I took his torch, and there were other batteries to recharge the lights in our packs.

Slowly, both hands cramped to the cord, I went forward. It seemed as though I had been groping on for centuries. Once the string snapped out of my hands, and I threw myself on the ground panting with fear until I found it again. At last, after I felt I had been long enough in the cave

to be classed as a prehistoric animal myself, the cord slackened, light showed ahead, the flickering illumination of a fire, and I instantly decided our white bearers had returned. With a shout, I dropped the limp cord and ducked into the main cave.

I had only time to see seven tall figures facing me around a fire, when strong hands grasped me on either side. Furiously, I struck out, then tried to drag my automatic from under my left arm. Down I went with two big men on top of me, and in less time than it takes to tell I was trussed up like a fowl and dragged to the fire.

There were nine great Patagonians, seven men and two women, grouped about me, dressed in mantles fashioned from guanaco skins and armed with knives, old muskets and bolas.

Beside the fire, nearly at my feet, lay a tenth savage, an immense man, but thin to the point of extreme emaciation—dead.

The younger woman (she was a right good-looking savage for all her six feet of height) whispered excitedly to the elder. The men regarded me silently.

"What the devil does this mean?" I sputtered in Spanish. "Turn me loose at once!"

"You'll have to get your devil to turn you loose," a man sneered at me in the same tongue. "We shall not. You have come into the cave of the Sacred Moon and disturbed those who were sleeping. To-morrow you die in honor of the one who lies before you."

Nice, wasn't it? End of Pete Wells, Esq., sacrificed to the glory of a Patagonian stiff with no clothes on, and buried in a cave haunted by the ghosts of prehistoric animals! I lost my temper.

"You don't say?" I remarked sarcastically. "Well, my devil will be here, and he'll make you turn somersaults under the 'Sacred Moon'."

"Aren't you afraid?" curiously asked the man nearest me.

"Not of you," I answered furiously, and, twisting one leg free, applied my foot forcibly to the pit of his stomach.

It was a fool thing to do, and he was on me in a second with raised knife. I thought my last moment had come, but the others pulled him away.

"No blood must be shed in the cave of the Sacred Moon," said the elder woman sternly. "To-morrow we will see to him. Now let us bury our dead."

Muttering evilly, my assailant stepped

aside. Raising the dead man, the others carried him to a shallow depression near the wall and unceremoniously scratched sand over him. Then, while the men stood in a circle and swayed before the dying fire, the girl began to sing in the corrupted Spanish that seems to have taken the place of the Patagonian tongue, if there ever was one:

*"Night has come that ends not,  
Night has come to thee,  
With the Great One quickly  
Thy spirit wanders free.  
Body lies in sacred ground,  
Spirit will fly soon  
Where the light is softest,  
Up to the bright, round moon."*

*"Where the light is softest,  
Up to the bright, round moon."*

The other savages crooned in unison, swaying back and forth and then settling to the ground.

There was a long silence, and the girl's voice again rose:

*"Night has come that ends not,  
Thou wilt go on high  
Where the light gleams always  
In the darkest sky.  
Earth will hold thy body,  
Ever and for ay;  
Spirit goes a floating  
Where the moonbeams play."*

*"Spirit goes a floating  
Where the moonbeams play."*

I shifted my position painfully, and felt something hard beneath my elbow. It was the shovel to which I had tied the guiding cord for our expedition into the cave, and, rolling further over, I sawed the rope that bound my arms against its point. The edge of the moon came down over the top of the entrance to the cave, and again the girl began to sing:

*"Night has come that ends not,  
But she comes, her light,  
Silver sparkling pathway,  
Guides thy steps aright.  
Sacred, O most sacred!  
Shines on sea and dune,  
Sacred, O most sacred,  
Bright and shining moon."*

*"Sacred, O most sacred!  
Bright and shining moon."*

The silvery disk outside lowered, filling the foreground of the cave with light. The ceremony evidently over, the Patagonians rose to their feet, and two of them stepped across the dead fire towards me.

The rope about my right arm was sawed through. With numbed fingers, I tried to draw my automatic from under my left armpit. The shovel slid from beneath me, began to progress into the darkness at the end of its cord.

With a flash of inspiration I pointed my free arm towards it.

"Look!" I howled. "Look! I send the senseless wood and iron for my devil! Tremble, fools, he is coming, the devil, the devil . . . from the moon!" I added as a happy afterthought.

Came a roar of fury from the blackness behind us.

"What in hell do you mean by leaving me this way, Pete Wells? What is all this row?"

There was the glare of an electric torch, and from its light emerged Bones. Great Caesar's ghost, but he nearly scared me!

His whiskers were plastered with mud and blood running from his freely bleeding nose; his great round body was one luminous mass of shiny white clay, and he lurched forward like a Bacchanalian moon, splitting curses at every step.

With a simultaneous yell of terror the savages dived for the entrance of the cave. I jerked out my automatic and fired at the rock above them, bringing down a piece in their midst. The mouth of the cave cleared like magic, and Bones stood over me, throwing his light on the motionless figure of the girl, who lay stunned by the fragment of rock that my bullet had brought down.

We revived our captive with a dash of water in her face, none the worse save for a lump on the side of her head, and decided to hold her as hostage for the present in case any of her friends returned. As a matter of fact, she showed no inclination to escape—just sat still, watching Bones with awe-filled eyes. Even when he had exchanged his glittering, clay-coated garments for prosaic khaki, it was evident she still looked on him as some kind of a god—or devil.

We slept across the entrance of the cave, guns beneath our hands, and save that the Russian conversed steadily about mylodons in his sleep, it was a perfectly quiet night.

MORNING found us penetrating into the cave, the Patagonian maid walking ahead with both of the packs which our bearers had abandoned. She picked them up unbidden, and didn't seem to consider their weight at all. Also the darkness evidently caused her no fear, since she kept on the very edge of the illumination thrown by our torches.

The top of the slippery clay chute where I had left Bones the night before presented an entirely different appearance in the daytime. The sunlight streamed down through the aperture in the rock above, and even lit the cell-like chamber at the bottom of the incline. The rude steps by which Bones had escaped were now overrun by the slimy clay, but we found it a simple matter to dig with our shovels a somewhat slippery but practical stairway to the bottom.

Then we really began to work. Not a bone was missing from the skeleton of the mylodon, and, furthermore, there were six square feet of skin, vivid and green, and studded on the inside with small bosses of bone, showing, the count said, that the animal had a rudimentary protecting shell beneath its fur, something after the fashion of an armadillo.

It was a happy fat man that collected this fifteen-foot skeleton, the bones in perfect preservation, even with pieces of sinew attached.

By relays, the girl silently doing more than her part, we transported the pieces into the main cave, and then it was noon. Lunch quickly gobbled, we went back to our excavating, and not another thing rewarded us. The rest of the bones, down to solid rock, proved to be of guanacos, jaguars, dogs and rabbits, not one single remnant dating back even a few thousand years.

"Don't understand it at all, Pete," complained the count. "Why should a mylodon's bones be mixed with those of modern animals? I can understand their being well preserved, because of the extraordinary conditions in the cave, but why mixed with modern animals, when all authorities claim mylodons have been extinct for a thousand years?"

"Simple enough," I answered. "Why couldn't one of your little pets have survived until recently, and then have been driven to suicide through loneliness, and jumped down that hole?"

"Why isn't the moon made of green cheese, as you English say?" disgustedly asked Bones.

"In the first place, I am an American, not an Englishman," I flared up, on my ear at once, "and, in the second place how are you going to prove the moon isn't made of green cheese or bacon rinds, as far as that goes?"

"It simply isn't," he snarled.

"How are you going to prove it? How are you going to prove that there isn't a mylodon sitting outside the cave this minute? You've got to show me."

The Lord knows it was silly, but we were both red hot by that time and shouting at the top of our voices. Glaring at one another, we both opened our mouths again at exactly the same time, thought better of it and snapped them shut. Then we went back into the main cave, where the count began to wrap his treasures in yards of thin, oiled silk, and staked the piece of skin out flat on the ground to dry. I built a fire from wood the girl collected and started to cook our evening meal.

All day long that Patagonian woman had toiled with us, carrying enormous burdens, collecting fuel, and had never once opened her lips to speak. So noiseless and unobtrusive had she been, in spite of her great height and splendid proportions, that we really hardly noticed her.

Subconsciously I had been aware that she seldom took her eyes from the little fat man, and when we had hauled out that piece of green fur I felt, rather than saw, her start. Now that the skin was pegged out flat and Bones had come to the fire, I could dimly discern her in the darkness kneeling by it, her arms stretched up to the roof of the cave.

We had finished our meal and lit our pipes, when there came from behind us a soft crooning:

"Ou-ou, ou-ou, ou-u-u,  
Ou-ou, ou-ou, ou-u-u."

Then, very softly at first, growing in volume with every note, the savage girl began to sing:

*Moon, moon; moon, moon,  
Bright with fire and white with snow.  
Moon, moon; moon, moon,  
Look down here below.  
By thy sacred sheep I kneel,  
Lest some wicked one should steal  
What is thine— Heed my appeal!  
Moon, moon; moon, moon."*

Bones started to rise, but I pulled him back. A beam of moonlight showed the

kneeling figure, face bowed to the green skin. Once more she raised her hands above her head, and again her lips opened:

*Messenger to earth thou sends,  
Moon, moon, O sacred moon.  
Lowly to him my heart bends,  
Moon, moon, O sacred moon.  
I, thy daughter, soon will go  
Through the cold, and ice, and snow,  
Where the molten streamlets glow,  
Where thy sheep are grazing slow,  
Sacred flocks to tend."*

Her voice sank at the end. Came the softly crooned "Ou-ou, ou-ou, ou-u-u," then silence.

"Let me talk to her. I have an idea." I whispered to Bones, a wild suspicion growing in my mind, and I called out in Spanish.

She came at once and stood before us. Straight as a mountain pine, six feet tall, head high, and great eyes fixed on my face, the woman was without fear, without servility, and yet was dominated, in the grip of a power she could not understand. Her apparent mental attitude might perhaps be paralleled with that of a child who obeys willingly, though it knows not why. She was really beautiful, too, that dark, splendidly strong girl, beautiful like a heroic statue.

"Do you want to go back to your people?" I asked.

"My lord's servant knows I cannot, since I have looked on him," she answered, turning her great eyes towards Bones.

"What will you do when we leave here?"

"Tend the sheep of the Sacred Moon with those so old they are no longer of the tribe."

"Where are these sheep?"

"Beyond the snow, and ice, and fire."

"We will go with you in the morning. Sleep now."

"As my lord wills," and she drew back into the darkness of the cave.

"What do you make of that?" I demanded excitedly of the Russian.

"Well, I don't know. The tribe has sheep some place that the very old people tend. I suppose the girl is kind of taboo through associating with us. Don't see why we should waste time running after the sheep, though."

"What kind of sheep do you suppose the sheep of the Sacred Moon are?"

"I don't know. You can't mean. . . . Oh, you're crazy Pete!"

"Crazy or not, I'm going to find out,"

I answered. "What was she singing about, if not that Irish-colored fur? I'm going to see those sheep. Can't prove the moon isn't made of green cheese, but I can and will run this down."

The silk-wrapped bones and piece of skin were left at the little farm with the old-old man, who when he heard we were going down the coast with the girl announced that they would come in handy for fertilizer—said we wouldn't return to claim them. Even the Patagonians who went that way were never seen again. With this cheerful prophecy as a send-off, packs stripped down to the bare necessities, but still with our shovels and mattocks, we set out.

I have been on many a hike in my life, but never one to touch that. Our guide first led us several miles back from the sea, and then turned due north. All day, we followed a trail along the barren rocks of the coast zone—rather a line than a trail, since it was but three inches wide. The Patagonian easily covered the ground, walking, as do most savages, with a swing to her hips that enabled her to put one foot almost directly in front of the other. To us, following that narrow path was like walking a tight rope. How the fat man did it I really don't know; it must have been an agony of effort for him. Nevertheless, from sun up till dark his great round body progressed steadily on before me.

That night we slept in a cave where bubbled up a spring of sulphur-laden, boiling water, and we slept hard.

**A**T DAWN, our trail wound up through the forest from which we emerged; at noon the mountains towered high above us. Crossing a swampy tundra, we descended a gentle dip, and stood on the edge of an immense glacier, smooth, straight, reaching down in steep incline to where sparkled, miles and miles away, the waters of the Pacific.

Here the girl paused and, pointing out a peak across the ice, indicated that a path must be cut towards it. Our mattocks and shovels came into play, and while the woman and I hewed a way in the ice, the Russian shoveled out the fragments behind us, tossing them on the smooth surface, along which they slid towards the sea, their tinkle growing fainter and fainter until swallowed up in the distance. Darkness caught us still laboring, and we were forced to spend the night on the edge of the glacier, doubly cold through comparison with the glowing

reflection of a volcano on the night sky.

As soon as it was light enough to see, we were at it again. A great wall of vapor or steam rose on the opposite side of the glacier, ending abruptly at the point where our path was aimed. By two o'clock we were safely across, and paused in awe at the panorama spread before us.

The glacier was held by a thin ridge of rock, on the other side of which ran a broad stream of boiling water gushing out from a cavern beneath our feet. Above hung a cloud of vaporous steam, spreading out over a valley and completely hiding it, while on every side towered snow-capped mountains. The whole place looked like a great pit filled to the top with snow.

"How long do you suppose the rock will hold the ice back from the valley?" I asked Bones in a whisper. Somehow, it didn't seem right to speak aloud in the immensity of all things.

"Don't know," he answered. "The ice has been grinding at one side, the stream wearing at the other, probably for thousands of years. This place seems like the beginning of the world."

We crossed above where the boiling spring gushed out from the cavern, and found grass growing luxuriantly not ten feet from the glacier. Along the bank of the stream the girl led, with us following, the land sloping gently downward, the precipice rising higher and higher on the opposite bank. Once, the count touched my shoulder and pointed to a great fissure in the rocky wall fully a yard wide, seemingly created that very moment, ice squeezing through it at the top and melting, drop by drop, to fall hissing on the seething water below.

The grass rose to our thighs, to our shoulders; trees appeared, then dense thickets, tangled, lush, green. Our leader turned at right angles and plunged into the vegetation. The cloud of vapor seemed to be resting on the tree tops. It shut off the sky, and, condensing, fell steadily in an infinitesimally fine rain.

We walked in a humid, breathlessly hot mist. The trail opened into a broad, hard-beaten road, flat as though crushed down with a roller. On either side rose enormous trees hung with lianas and orchids, beneath them a nearly impenetrable tangle of underbrush thirty feet high, sappy, living green, save for splashes of the white, crimson or gold orchids.

"Here pasture the sheep of the Sacred Moon, here shall I dwell forever," spoke the girl.

"Where are the sheep?" I demanded.

As if in answer came a crash close to the road, and the underbrush swayed. Breathless, I glanced at Bones, but his staring eyes were riveted on something above my head.

"Wheat-wheat, wheat-wheat," came a tiny voice from the tree tops, and I looked up straight into a face peering down at me. And what a face! The round, yellow, foolish eyes were set well up in the narrow, greenish forehead; two flat, sniffing nostrils expanded and closed above a thick-lipped, vacuous mouth, from which protruded a long, slender, blue tongue, like a piece of satin ribbon. Never have I seen anything that portrayed such complete imbecility as that face!

"The utter damned fool!" I heard myself say aloud.

"Wheat-wheat," came the ridiculously tiny voice, the underbrush parted, and an immense bulk moved out into the open.

If you could have forgotten the idiot face (which you couldn't), I suppose the mere size of the animal would have made it impressive. It was as big as an elephant, as an elephant sitting on its haunches. The hind legs were enormous, doubled under it, and ending in great, flat paws; the back was curved, nearly humped; the forelegs were short, powerful, and armed with stupendous claws; the neck was long, a cord dangling from it, and topped by that fool head, maddeningly out of proportion to the bulk of the rest of the animal; while the entire body was covered with short, very green fur.

"Heavenly saints!" breathed the Russian. "It's a mylodon come back from the birth of time—utterly different from what we have conceived, but a mylodon; yes, a mylodon; a mylodon; yes, a mylodon. . . ."

He kept repeating "A mylodon; yes, a mylodon," till my nerves snapped like cotton thread.

"Nobody said it was a teakettle!" I roared. "Supposing it is a mylodon, what in hell are you going to do with it?"

"We'll go on further," the little man answered, as though talking in his sleep, and paying not the slightest attention to my words; "perhaps we'll find something else."

"Heaven forbid!" I piously ejaculated. "This is enough for me!"

The creature let itself down on all fours, and with a final silly "Wheat-wheat" half hopped, half walked into the jungle, while we continued down the road in the dripping mist.

The ground rose and the trees became more scattered. A great cave opened in the mountainside and, pausing before it, the girl called out.

From within came eight Patagonians, seven men and one woman, or rather eight relics of the past. They were the oldest human beings I have ever looked upon—bent, gnarled, wrinkled, not one could have been less than a hundred years old. Peering out from age-bleared eyes, they blinked at us like an assembly of galvanized mummies.

"I come to watch the sheep," the girl said tonelessly, "and he" —pointing at Bones—"is a messenger from the Sacred Moon who would see how we tend our charges."

"You are everyyoung to leave the tribe never to return," the withered hag mumbled.

"My lord brought me here," the girl answered simply.

Within the cavern it was dark as pitch and dripping wet. Another pleasant discovery we made was that nothing would burn.

Tree and shrub were too full of sap; there was no dead dry wood, just wet decay. The Patagonians evidently lived entirely on fruits, and it was on fruits that we dined.

**D**USK was approaching, indicated by an evener opaqueness in the midst and less condensation into rain. The nine Patagonians, our guide included, moved off down the road. The count busied himself putting his camera to rights, grumbling meanwhile about the difficulty of taking pictures in that perpetually cloudy atmosphere and cursing the fates that he had but one flashlight powder. I pressed the moisture out of my clothes between two flat stones.

Suddenly a perfect chorus of "Wheat-wheats" broke on our ears, and the most extraordinary procession man has ever looked upon defiled up the road.

Each of the old, old Patagonians was leading—yes, *leading*—a mylodon by a rope around its slim neck, the girl bringing up the rear with a cunning little one, evidently very young and merely some six or seven feet tall. The other eight colossal green beasts ran in size from fifteen to twenty feet, the largest, the only male in the bunch, having a kind of a crest of upright bristles along its back. Past us they wheeled into the cavern—round, yellow eyes gazing aimlessly in every direction,

blue, ribbon-like tongues hanging from vacuous mouths.

"Hea-venly days!" I ejaculated, and sat down in a puddle. The count's eyes were popping from his head, and he began to repeat something in Russian that may have been a prayer, but sounded like the sputtering of a dynamite fuse. I recovered my senses first.

"Come on!" I commanded. "Let's see the little dears tucked into their beddies—and then drink the bottle of brandy we brought along for medicine. I know I'm sick—symptoms, a strange belief in things I do see but that can't be true."

We followed the procession into the blackness, electric torches in hand, and came to a further cave that was nearly dry. Here the Indians were slipping the ropes loosely about stakes driven in the ground. The great beasts loomed up under our lights like green mountains, and the glare of the electricity brought forth a disturbed chorus of the ridiculous, tiny cries. Their guardians angrily motioned us back, and we retreated outside.

"This, Pete, is the greatest thing that has happened in science for five hundred years!" exclaimed Bones. "Let's bend every thought and energy to getting the most out of it. We'll find out all we can from the girl, and then, when the savages are asleep, steal in and take a flashlight of that sleeping flock of prehistoric survivors."

As we talked, a change came over the sky. The cloud of vapor caught the rays of the setting sun and reflected them through in countless rainbows of every color in the spectrum. Out into the beautiful illumination came the Patagonians and, grouping in a circle, with the old hag in the middle, sang a kind of an evening hymn:

*O sacred moon now rising.  
(Alas, we cannot see!)  
All day we faithful tended  
Thy holy flocks for thee.  
Now night comes in its glory,  
Forget us not below,  
Remember thy great promise  
That death we shall not know."*

After this lyric rendering, we called the girl to us and put her through a long interrogation. It was rather difficult to get things straightened out, because she assumed we knew so many things of which we were ignorant. Finally, however, a chain of information was evolved.

When first she knew of the vapor-hidden valley there were only two mylodons. The other seven sprang from the original pair. The legend was that as long as there were mylodons so long would those who tended them live, and the Patagonian race as a whole survive. Their ever present anxiety was that something would happen to the old male, the only representative of his sex, all his progeny having been females.

Of course, Patagonians died outside the valley and were buried in the cave of the Sacred Moon, the girl conceded, and sometimes those within the valley, through their infirmities, became tired of living and slipped quietly into the boiling stream, but no one there was obliged to die. Within the records of the tribe the old woman had been there a hundred and then forty snows. Once a year all the Patagonians came to the valley to count the moon sheep. They were due very soon now, she concluded, and would worship the messenger of the Sacred Moon with song and dance.

After the girl had retired, we sat outside the cave steaming in the hot, wet darkness, and talked things over. Without an argument we agreed that it was too great a risk to trust to Bones' clay-created godhead for our safety and await the arrival of the able-bodied Patagonians. What we had to do must be done quickly. That very night we would take the flashlight photograph within the cave, and the next day use the balance of our films in the forest.

For two hours, in order that the savages might all be asleep, we waited, and then, slipping off our shoes, stole within the cave. The way was easy to find even without a light, our feet feeling the solid path beaten by the weight of the monsters, and we knew at once, when we were inside the second cavern, by a roaring like the sea, the snoring of the great beasts. Then I snapped on my torch so Bones could set up his camera. With the flood of light, first one then another of the mylodons awoke and rose to its feet, looming up monstrous shadows whence came weird twitterings. I stepped back of Bones and spread the flashlight dust inside my tobacco pouch, the only dry thing I had. Match after match refused to light, then one flickered and blazed up, and I dropped it into the powder.

There was a puffing blind of light showing the terror-stricken eyes of the immense animals turned toward us, the click

of the camera shutter, then darkness shaken by a mighty tread. I pressed the button of my torch and jerked Bones, the camera in his arms, against the wall of the cave. The mylodons were thundering down on us like an avalanche, and the air was full of their shrill calls, while from the distance came the frightened cries of the Patagonians.

Hours we leaned motionless against the rock, scarce daring to breathe, then stole silently to the entrance of the cave and, rolling in our wet blankets, waited for dawn.

No matter how great the excitement sleep will not be denied to tired, healthy men, and we both dropped off just as the vapor outside began to whiten. The next I knew, I woke to a wailing as though of lost souls, sat up to find it broad daylight, and Bones bending over me.

"Something terrible has happened, from the sound those savages are making," he whispered. "Keep your gun ready and let's go see."

I followed him out into the fine drizzle, and we turned down the broad road. The old, old Patagonians were rolling on the ground and raising their hands to heaven in frantic sorrow. Before them lay the male mylodon dead, its neck broken where it had collided with a giant forest tree in the darkness.

The mourners paid no attention to us; just kept up their horrible wailing interjected with broken plaints:

"The father of the sheep of the Sacred Moon is gone, is gone, and soon we, too, shall be no more. . . . We, who hoped to live forever, must die. . . ."

**L**EAVING the frantic savages, we went back and got the camera, passed down the road unmolested, and plunged into the jungle. It was easy to locate where the monsters were feeding from the crash of breaking trees and the swaying of the underbrush, but quite another matter to photograph them. In the first place their color blended so perfectly with the lush green of the forest that, in spite of their bulk, it was very hard to see them; then again, we could never get all of a mylodon at once because of the thickness of the vegetation.

Finally, when we reached the spot where the first monster had been seen on our entrance into the valley, we decided that the only practical plan was to lead one out into the road and snap it there. Plunging into the underbrush, we fought our

way through to where the tree tops were waving, and I took hold of the rope that hung from a mylodon's neck, not without inward quakings. It followed me like a lamb. When we were nearly out of the underbrush, Bones raised his hand.

"Wait," he whispered; "I hear something."

So did I. From the direction of the glacier came the sound of many voices singing. Nearer it came, till we could distinguish the words:

*"Children of moon are we,  
Fear not the darkest shade,  
Trusting, O moon, to thee,  
Of darkness unafraid."*

*"Come to thy cloudland  
Where thy flocks be,  
There, hand in hand,  
To worship thee."*

Peeking out through the tree trunks, we saw an entire tribe of splendid Patagonians file by—warriors, women and children, and not an adult under six feet.

We lay still in the woods until the mylodon began to graze and nearly pulled a tree down on top of us.

"Oh, hell," I broke the silence; "we're in for it now, Count. There isn't a chance of getting away if that bunch gets after us. All we can do is to shoot as many of 'em as we are able before going under. Let's lead Irene, here, to the road. You snap her till you're tired, and then we'll beat it."

Out in the open, I tied the cord to a tree, and standing behind Bones, whistled so the beast would turn its idiotic face toward us. The count took picture after picture from every angle, and while he was doing it a mad plan had occurred to me.

"Look here, Bones," I stuttered; "let's take this prehistoric silly with us. She'll serve as a breastwork to get behind if we have to fight. I know it's like stealing a whole church, but I'll try anything once."

The Russian gave a whoop of joy.

"Pete, I never thought of it! If we get your Irene to the coast we'll be the most famous men on two continents."

Down that road we went, Bones leading, through the brush and out by the flow of boiling water, the mylodon following docilely at the end of the rope. Across the hot stream, the crack in the side of the precipice was now twenty feet wide, and great masses of ice were pushing through. I saw Bones glance at it apprehensively

and shake his head. Over the rock, whence gushed the water, we climbed, and out on to the path we had cut in the glacial ice. And here we had to go more slowly. The beast's great pads kept slipping on the smooth surface, and her foolish face was contracted with fear at the cold beneath her feet.

"Stop a minute," I suggested, "and let Irene rest."

"All right. I'll take a snap of you leading her, with the glacier for background."

I felt the ice tremble under my feet as the camera clicked.

"Get up, old girl," I clucked, jerking at the cord.

The mylodon did not move. She lifted from the ice first one enormous cold foot, then another, swinging her foolish head from side to side, and uttering her inadequate, plaintive cry. Then she started to lie down.

"For God's sake, don't do that," I yelled, jerking at the rope; "you'll slide clear to the coast."

Paying no attention to my frantic yanks, down she went on her side, lifted her feet in the air and turned on to her great, round back, then rolled ponderously over and tried to scramble to her feet. She slipped, the rope pulling through my hands; recovered herself, slid, whirled about and went swiftly down the steep incline, gathering impetus with every second.

There was a mad chorus of yells behind us. The Patagonians were climbing on to the ice. I felt the glacier heave. With a terrific crash the barrier of rock on the shore gave way. Half the glacier, splitting from the main body, went over into the boiling stream, carrying our pursuers with it.

The mylodon was a speck in the distance, growing rapidly smaller against the sparkle of the Pacific.

How the count and I reached solid ground, I do not clearly remember. I have some vague recollection of hitting him on the point of the jaw to keep him from following the mylodon, and then running across the ice, his hand in mine. Anyway, when we were up on the bank, the glacier splitting into fragments below us, he was crying like a child. And cry he did for two whole days, his mind seemingly quite gone.

I lost the trail we had followed coming in, and had to strike for the coast by compass. The rest was one long agony of going forward, always forward, through

the forest, across another glacier, over a bleak, boulder-strewn land, and then coming to a little white settlement on the seashore. There a British tramp steamer picked us up and landed us at Valparaiso, where for two months I nursed Bones through a raging brain fever.

An end comes to everything if you wait long enough. Time found us on a passenger steamer for San Francisco, but we were not the same men. At least the Russian wasn't the same. Every recollection of what had happened to us had been wiped from his mind. He knew who he was, who I was, and was rational in every other respect, but he didn't know where he had been or why.

When I called him rational in every respect, I told a lie. He had gone plumb dippy over women. Before we landed I found out that he was engaged to all three of the unmarried girls on the boat.

At San Francisco I took the train across the continent to Jacksonville. Bones hated to have me go; begged me to come to Russia with him at any salary I cared to name; said he was going to get married and settle down. I told him that, with his fund of feminine appreciation, Russia would never do for him; he'd end up in Turkey, and I'd never be able to live happily in a land where the women wore trousers.

At parting he presented me with a magnificent watch, and I never saw him again.

Jacksonville certainly looked good to me. The second evening I sat in Swartz's Café, with the old Dutchman himself across from me, and started to tell him of my adventures. As a preliminary I passed over the flashlight of the mylodons Bones had taken in the cave. Swartz looked at it a moment, and then asked:

"A new kind of mice, *nicht wahr*?"

I picked up the photograph and examined it. There stood the mylodons, just as I had seen them when the powder flashed, but, unless you had known it, there was no means of gauging their size, nothing in the picture with which to compare them. I opened my mouth to explain, and then shut it again.

"Yes, a new kind of mouse," I agreed. The story of my wanderings, I improved.

Up in my room that night, I gazed for a long time at the snapshot of me leading Irene, the lady mylodon, across the glacier. Then, with a sigh, I hid it in the very bottom of my trunk.

What was the use?